

Cash-for-jobs: Calcutta HC scraps all but one of 25,758 school hirings in Bengal

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KOLKATA:Calcutta HC invalidated Monday all but one of 25,758 appointments made by Bengal's School Service Commission (SSC) in 2016 and ordered around 1,600 of these recruits to return within four weeks the salaries and allowances they had been paid so far with 12% interest.

The division bench of Justices Debangsu Basak and Md Shabbar Rashidi made a lone exception for cancer patient Soma Das, who got her job "on humanitarian grounds".

Stating that it was difficult under the circumstances to "sift the grain from the chaff", HC said the "exact number" of people benefiting from "manipulations and illegalities" in the selection process couldn't be identified. "We are left with the option of

cancelling all the appointments," it said, directing CBI to continue with its investigation into the cash-for-jobs case and interrogate people in custody, if necessary.

The bench also directed SSC to start a fresh recruitment process against vacancies within a fortnight.

In cancelling the entire selection process, the bench reserved the strictest penalties for appointees identified as having submitted blank OMR sheets in the recruitment test, and those given jobs outside the purview of the selection panel or after its term ended.

Teachers of classes IX to XII and candidates recruited to posts in groups C (clerical) and D are among those whose appointments stand cancelled, according to the order.

SSC will move Supreme Court against the order. "We are not satisfied with the order. It is very harsh," its chairperson Siddhartha Majumder said.

In its affidavit, SSC reported 1,539 "excess" appointments to teaching posts for classes IX and X by the Madhyamik Board, besides 416 to Group C posts and 669 in Group D. Another 199 teachers were appointed in excess of sanctioned posts, it said.

"The board has no authority to issue appointment letters unless recommended by SSC," the bench said.

It directed CBI to interrogate state govt officials involved in the cabinet decision to create supernumerary posts.

"The principal secretary produced a cabinet note and a memo on the creation of supernumerary posts," the bench noted. "So, in other words, the state resolved to spend taxpayers' money to accord sanction to an employment secured dishonestly."

The order mentions the chief secretary's "obdurate attitude" in granting sanction to CBI's request to start proceedings against officials named in the chargesheet.

Chief Justice T S Sivagnanam assigned the case to the division bench in accordance with a November 2023 directive from Supreme Court.

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